

LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY

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There is much talk in the region about powerful chiefs, but no one has really seen one. In the past, the Indians say, there were chiefs over all the sibs along a river. Koch-Grünberg was told the same thing (1909, I, 264). One is also told that other people have powerful chiefs. I had no opportunity to investigate this, but Koch-Grünberg, who traversed all the main rivers in the region, was always told that the chiefs along another river were strong. The Desanas had only headmen, but they informed Koch-Grünberg that great chiefs ruled along the Papurí and Tiquié rivers. When he got there he found only headmen. If there has been a stronger political organization among the Cubeo in the past there is no suggestion of it now.

The fact is that leadership follows similar principles among all neighboring tribes from whom we have adequate information. Describing the Arawakan Siusi, Koch-Grünberg notes that the headmanship is a hereditary office, going from father to oldest son or to his younger brother. The headman himself passes on the office to someone in his line. His authority is minor and is concerned only with village affairs. It is based on the respect owed to age. The headman among the Siusi, he adds, is a representative, receiving guests and leading all community activities and discussions. He sees to it that the house is kept in order; and if he leaves for any length of time he turns the command over to his brother. He maintains order but he cannot punish. A headman who had long associated with the whites claimed authority over the entire river but no one took him seriously. Koch-Grünberg had the impression, however, that the oldest man in the maloca was the headman (1909, I, 68). This is not quite true among the Cubeo. The Cubeo respect age, but leadership, to repeat, depends upon ability to be a giver, so that a man who has gone too far past his prime is ordinarily ruled out as a headman.

LAW AND JUSTICE

With respect to the administration of justice and of order the headman is no magistrate. He is a mediator, a counselor, and often a persuasive advocate of his own views. It is the entire adult community that must reach a decision. The headman provides for orderly discussion until a decision is reached. Within the sib a primary objective of the headman's efforts is to smooth over difficulties, calm tempers, and restore the atmosphere of congeniality. There are, however, serious breaches of the peace, such as sorcery, persistent adultery, chronic and malicious theft of food, and murder when punishment is called for. In such cases the aim of the headman is not to calm